Safe with me

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by Avonne

Summary

Callum comforts Austin on a cozy evening.

Notes

I'm *super* tired and finished this drabble way too late, but I couldn’t wait with it until tomorrow. I've wanted to write this for ages. It's a gift for Carnevol

It’s set around December 2024, not long after the end of Austin's work on Caught Stealing.

All fictional! No disrespect intended. I don’t know the real Austin and Callum.

With all that said, I hope you guys enjoy this fluffy drabble.

Austin loves floor lamps. Floor lamps and fairy lights. They remind him of the pillow forts he used to build as a little boy, forever engraved in gold-tinted nostalgia. It's a mundane, random fact about him that most people don't know but Callum treasures. When Austin mentioned this to him with that idle, musing tone of his as he gave Callum a tour of his new place, Callum felt his heart swell with warmth. What might be nothing but an offhand remark to Austin is value to him - a new side of his love discovered, another brushstroke in the brilliant painting of Austin's personality.

It's not something Callum would share with the press, ever. Let them think that Austin doing pottery is the most interesting thing he can say. Their vulturous attention would taint anything else, would twist it into something it isn't or strip it of its human vulnerability to sensationalize it. What would the public do with the knowledge that Austin likes to hum in the shower or that he needs to wrap himself in several blankets at night unless Callum cradles him with his warm body? He shudders just thinking about it.

From his end of the couch, he glances towards Austin where he sits curled up and sunk into the thick cushions. The floor lamp he was so pleased about casts a muted light on his face, like a sunset painting him in golden relief. It traces the curve of his cheek gently, leaving only the softest of shadows that ripple under Austin's eyelashes when he blinks. He's completely immersed in the old Western he and Callum have been watching, Callum can tell. Not that it's hard to. Austin's wide, focused eyes and the way he mouths at the ends of his hoodie's strings without realizing it are dead giveaways. The pulled up hood covers his head.

A huffing chuckle escapes Callum's nose. It's *his* hoodie actually. Although it's plain and black, he can tell by the size of it, from the way it billows out around Austin's shoulders and folds into rolls on his stomach. Another cherished fact that he knows - Austin loves wearing his loved ones' clothes because they smell like them.

Smiling, Callum drapes his arm over the back of the couch, pinches the hood between two fingers and, slowly, begins to pull it down. Predictably, it's not enough to distract Austin from his beloved cowboys and outlaws on screen. Once the fabric slips off his head, he just reaches for it and tugs it back up. Callum wonders why - they're indoors, alone. There's no one here they need to hide from.

He takes hold of the hood again, but Austin interrupts the gesture by

putting his own arm up on the back of the couch too. When his fingers brush Callum's bare skin, Callum reaches for them and captures them with his own. They're warm and welcoming as usual, sliding into the gaps between Callum's with familiar ease. But just as the puzzle pieces of their hands finally come together, Austin switches things up with a sudden squeeze and a playful push.

Callum's grin lights up his face instantly. *Oh, so it's like that, huh,* he thinks, and returns Austin's grip. They hand wrestle like that for a few seconds, like they used to shove and swat at each before all this truly kicked off between them back in England, and Callum feels the same giddy spark in his chest igniting as a smile tugs up the corner of Austin's mouth too. He's still staring at the screen but his attention is finally where Callum wanted it.

Taking full advantage of the moment, Callum leans forward and draws their joined hands to his lips. When he presses a kiss to the back of Austin's, the shadows on Austin's face sharpen in the deepening curve of his smile. His thumb swipes back and forth over Callum's and picks at it as if inviting him to play more, but he still keeps his gaze fixed on the bloody movie.

Callum leans back against the arm of the couch. "Austin."

"Hm."

When that turns out to be all his reply, Callum tugs at his hand - and finally, at last, Austin's blue eyes slide away from the movie and find his. Callum's grin quiets into a flirty smirk.

"Come here." He inclines his head. At Austin's playfully suspicious look, he can't help but flash his teeth in a mischievous grin again. "I don't bite."

Austin laughs, turning his face away in the remnants of a gesture that was born from his old shyness as a boy. When he turns back to Callum, his smile is still wide, but his eyes are hooded and radiate a flirty invitation. The apples of his cheeks flush in delight.

"Yes, you do."

Callum barks a laugh. "Only if I like you."

"Is that so?"

Austin tilts his head to the side as if actually contemplating that. The

movement exposes more of his neck under the cover of the hood, drawing Callum's eyes there, tempting him to tuck his face into that juncture and kiss Austin's supple skin until he leaves a mark. But more than anything, Callum feels protective tonight, so he doesn't take that offering, he just nods and pulls his lips into his mouth to control his smile.

"That's right."

"Oh, okay." Austin says with fake surprise, then he gives in at last and pushes himself closer to Callum's side. When Callum's arm curls around his back, he lays his head on Callum's shoulder.

Callum presses a kiss to his forehead. "What's wrong?"

As though he thought it could distract Callum from the matter at hand, Austin strokes a palm down Callum's abdomen, then hugs him around the waist. "Nothing."

Uh-huh.

"Maybe we should do another bootcamp." Callum starts, satisfied to hear a confused huff from Austin. He reaches up and tickles Austin's cheek. "A bootcamp for Austin to talk about his feelings."

It's reassuring when that earns him a giggle. The sweet memory of all that time they spent together in London. Gone by too fast. If only they could've stayed there together forever. Maybe one day. There's always hope that they can figure it out.

"All right, all right." Austin bats Callum's hand away but he shifts to settle more comfortably in his embrace. There's a pause, then a sigh falls from Austin's lips in a long exhale. "It's my hair."

Callum frowns. They've discussed Austin's buzzcut for Caught Stealing many, many times, and each time, Austin seemed either excited or amused by his new looks. He didn't seem bothered by the comments raining on him from well-meaning family members and friends who either mourned his long locks or went too overboard with the compliments for it to seem genuine to someone as acutely aware as Austin. But it has been a few weeks and he hasn't mentioned anything.

"What about it?" Callum kisses Austin's forehead again. He keeps his head pressed to Austin's. The contact radiates warmth between them.

"Doesn't feel right." Austin says eventually. "I know that it looks

okay.” He adds. His voice rumbles pleasantly against Callum’s side. “But it feels like I'm exposed, you know? Vulnerable.”

Callum does. He's had numerous buzzcuts over the years, and while the sensation can be freeing, he can still remember the urge to wear a hat everywhere those times when he actually missed his curls. There's nothing you can do about it but push through it until you get used to it. Perhaps all Austin needs is a bit of comfort to chase those feelings away.

“Yeah. I know.” Gently, Callum pulls Austin's hood down again. This time, Austin lets him. When his large, warm palm runs over Austin's fuzzy hair, Austin sighs. “But you're safe here.”

Callum continues petting Austin's hair. It's soft under his touch, and a little bit longer already than it was a few days ago when Callum arrived from England. “You’re safe with me, baby.”

Another piece of Callum's treasure of facts - Austin loves open affection and pet names.

Sluggish from the comfort of Callum's hand still stroking his hair, Austin raises his head and looks Callum in the eye. There's gratitude in his gaze, tender and quiet, and an open yearning that could break Callum's heart if he stared at it too long. He lets his eyelids flutter close under the glow of those emotions, and a moment later, Austin's lips are pressed to his in a silent *I love you.*

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